

Finance Council Minutes

January 21, 1999

Citibank Purchase Card - Mark St. Clair

The Department of Commerce (DOC) is having some difficulty with the new Purchase Card contractor, Citibank. In fact, as of this date, DOC is not paying Citibank invoices for Purchase Cards due to missing and/or incorrect information on both cardholder and approving official statements. Other problems include the format of the cardholder statements. These statements do not allow enough room for annotating accounting data. Janette Labee, the DOC coordinator for Citibank, is working with Citibank to revise the format of the statements to allow room for accounting data. Larry Klingensmith suggested that certain NOAA accounting data fields be printed on the cardholder statements to further assist NOAA in properly detailing accounting transactions. His suggestion will be presented to Janette Labee.

NOAA Payment System (NPS)/Core Financial System (CFS) Issues - Mark St. Clair

NPS 2000 - The software is being debugged. Our resident tester has stated that it is getting closer to production quality. No firm date yet on when NPS 2000 will replace the current NPS software.

CFS - Until substantial enhancements are made to the CFS software, NOAA's major document types (01, 03, 40-43) will most likely not be processed in CFS for the remainder of this fiscal year. The DOC programmers and contractors are now working to adjust the software to meet NOAA's and Census' needs in these areas. They anticipate an 8 to 9 month period to add these enhancements.

Several ASCs stated they were not getting cooperation from vendors to obtain their banking information. Payments to these vendors might be delayed (without interest penalty payments being made). Also, vendors are having a hard time identifying Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) payments. The line offices could receive complaint from vendors about these matters.

Audit Status/Conference - R. J. Dominic

RJ will receive the draft report on Monday. It will be hand carried to the M&Bs and FedExed to the ASCs. Comments are due on **February 1**; there will be no extensions.

At this point, it looks as if we might receive an Unqualified opinion on the Balance Sheet. The reason we aren't getting this opinion on the rest of the statements is because the Beginning Balances weren't audited last year. Last year there were 6 Material Weaknesses, 2 were moved to Reportable Conditions and 2 were resolved. The remaining 2 are: 1) Construction Work In Process and 2) Monitoring Grants.

Last year there were 11 Reportable Conditions and 8 were resolved. The Reportable Conditions are: 1) Preparation and Analysis of Financial Reports, 2) Budget Execution, 3) Accounts Payable Accruals, 4) Credit Reform, and 5) Interagency Agreements.

A Lansdowne conference is being planned for March 4 and 5. It might only be 1 ½ days. The Line Offices must be represented to work on the Corrective Action Plans. RJ will work on the agenda the first week in February.

The auditors were not able to audit the Statement of Net Cost because they didn't receive it in sufficient time, so we will get a Disclaimer on it.

Travel Items - R. J. Dominic

Obligating Travel Advances - In the past, we did not obligate Travel Orders. A proposal was distributed to the M&Bs for recording an Undelivered Order for the amount of the Travel Advance. Please let RJ know of any issues by **January 29**. In FY 1999, we will need to record Undelivered Orders for all advances (including salary advances).

Invitational Travel Advances - RJ proposed an idea/concept to the Department where the traveler would submit an estimated voucher and it be recorded as an expense rather than issuing advances. If there is a difference after the travel is completed, the traveler can claim it. It would be up to the line offices to get unused money back from the traveler.

TDY Travel Advances - We are waiting on a response from the NWS Unions. We should receive their comments this week and then we'll work through the issues with them. It was mentioned that no advance creates a hardship for lower grade employees. One of the big issues is travelers say they don't get reimburses in time. RJ stated the correct issue was getting the Travel Voucher to the Finance Office/ASCs. Another problem mentioned was some hotels requested 1 night payment when a reservation is made. Pat Oliver said they can submit a Travel Voucher immediately for the one night. Another issue was people with bad credit.

Someone asked what happened to an employee's Frequent Flyer Miles when they leave the agency. RJ said they expire.

Staffing Shortage Impact - R. J. Dominic

The Accounting Operations Division within the Finance Office is severely understaffed. It is not a \$ issue, rather a Human Resource Management Office (HRMO) issue. There are 20 vacancies out of 65 employees, and many of these vacancies are due to senior staff obtaining job in the Line Officers, Budget Office, and CAMS. We are working with HRMO to fill positions. The Line Offices suggested we try something similar to Census' Working Mothers Program. Another suggestion was to hire When Actually Employed (WAE) employees.

WASC is short 5 positions. They are having a problem hiring Accounting Technicians because a lot of Government agencies have left the Seattle area.

MASC is okay at this time.

CASC is short 3-4 positions. It is a \$ issue.

EASC has no problems at this time.

Department Payment System (DPS) Shutdown - Keith Schellhase

The DPS will shutdown on March 29, 1999. Originally, it was scheduled for December 31, 1998, but because we had to continue processing payments for the International Trade Administration until March 29, 1999, a decision was made to keep the DPS running for NOAA and BXA payments. Currently three payments are being made through DPS: Purchase Orders, Travel vouchers and advances, and FEDSTRIP. Local travel and imprest type payments are made through CAMS. Transportation (airplane tickets) and Government Bills of Lading payments are being made through CAMS.

All FY 1999 purchase orders are being made through the NPS. The Finance Office asks the line offices to watch for FIMA coding errors on FY 1999 purchase orders. Technicians in the Finance Office have had to go from a completely automated system to a manual system, and coding errors have been identified in FIMA. Contact the Finance Office if errors are identified.

Some travel payments are being made through Travel Manager, but because of the time it takes to enter a document into Travel Manager, vouchers are continuing to be processed through the DPS. This is why some travelers may get a check and others may get their reimbursement directly into their bank account.

Government Transportation Account (GTA) in FIMA - Keith Schellhase

The GTA is now processed in CAMS. There is no change in the way these charges appear in FIMA. They will use the travel order number as the document number. The only difference is CAMS will now send an accrual transaction to FIMA when the data is entered into CAMS. These payments are subject to prompt pay, so the disbursement transaction will be sent to FIMA when the payment is actually made. Credits can be also processed thru CAMS, so these charges should be recorded in FIMA sooner than they previously were.

The GTA invoices will not be paid by any of the Finance Offices' until Citibank provides invoices with the necessary information. Since Citibank took over the contract, they have been unable to provide the Finance Offices with a proper invoice. This was a Department decision.

Other Items Not on the Agenda

Imprest Fund - There was a fraud case in the Washington area. Because of it, we will be notifying the Approving Officials by email when a payment is made from the imprest fund. RJ asked M&Bs to alert Approving Officials that they will be getting emails from the cashiers starting next week.

Object Class Codes - A committee is being established to look at Object Class Codes. Frank Grenci is leading it for the Finance Office and Mark Dunavent is from the Budget Office. RJ asked the Line Offices who they want to participate by the **January 29**. The meetings will be held in Silver Spring. The revised object class codes will be in effect on October 1.

Imprest Funds - Keith distributed a list of the Imprest Funds that the Finance Office/ASCs are planning on closing. These funds did not send a justification to RJ to keep them open.

Questions from the Line Offices:

John Oliver requested a workshop on how the Statement of Net Cost is put together; basically what the line office's responsibilities are. He suggested it be held during the Lansdowne conference.